

## North Carolina Smart Start Technical Assistance Grant

In January 2002 Community Empowerment was selected to receive a \$150,000 technical assistance grant to help strengthen and expand Iowa's state and local partnership for providing quality care and education for young children in Iowa. The Technical Assistance Grant comes from the North Carolina Smart Start National Technical Assistance Center.

Smart Start is North Carolina's public-private early childhood initiative to help all children enter school healthy and ready to succeed. Smart Start has garnered much national recognition and is considered a model for comprehensive early childhood initiatives. In 2001, the North Carolina Partnership for Children established a National Technical Assistance Center to assist other states with the development of early childhood initiatives. Through foundation funding, the technical assistance grant program was also made available.

The grant is not a cash grant to Iowa but rather resources worth up to \$150,000 including: On-Call Coach; "Expert" Consultation; Information and Referral; Site Visits; Mentoring Program; Conferences; Smart Start Speakers Bureau; Smart Start Resource Materials; and National Smart.Net.

### *Timeline:*

1. *Initial Site Visit by Smart Start staff January 2002*
2. *Research and Materials Review by Smart Start staff January – March 2002*
3. *National Smart Start Pre-Conference and Conference Participation by Empowerment Team January 2002*
4. *Assessment Site Visit/Orientation Day March 2002*
5. *Formal Assessment by Stakeholders Using ITAG Assessment Tool March 2002*
6. *Preliminary Recommendations March/April 2002*
7. *Technical Assistance Plan Developed May 2002*
8. *Detailed Work Plan Finalized June 2002*
9. *Implementation Phase June 2002 – Fall 2003*

The key recommendations from Smart Start on the next page form the foundation for the work to be conducted throughout the grant period.

## **Smart Start Recommendations to Community Empowerment (March 2002)**

The following recommendations are designed to build upon and strengthen what has already been accomplished by Community Empowerment and to assist the initiative in moving to the next level of development.

- Develop a comprehensive, compelling and unifying vision for all Iowa's young children.
  - Convene a broad circle of stakeholders to develop the vision.
  - Position Community Empowerment as the organizational vehicle to lead Iowa's vision for young children.
  - Build upon the existing strategic plan to identify 3-5 year targeted goals for young children and those who care for them.
  - Develop a blueprint that assures the integration of the 3-5 year targeted goals at both the state and local level.
  - Translate the vision into actual legislative and policy changes.
- Strengthen and build on the accountability for results at the state and local levels.
  - Create more specific performance standards around the quality of early care and education.
  - Create prioritized 3-5 year targeted goals with broad stakeholder input.
  - Create an action plan that integrates these 3-5 year targeted goals into the work plans of the Departments of Education, Health, Human Rights, Management and Human Services.
  - Support local organizations with guidance as to best practices to achieve the 3-5 year targeted goals
  - Utilize existing data sources and broaden data collection efforts to measure progress towards Community Empowerment's 3-5 year targeted goals
- Deepen and broaden the public will to support early childhood issues.
  - Develop a public engagement campaign that includes messages on the importance of early childhood, including targeted messages that link early childhood to economic development and early childhood as a key component of the continuum of public education.
  - Create a stronger link between Community Empowerment and early childhood.
  - Assure that public engagement leads to grassroots advocacy and support for a public and private investment in early childhood.
  - Forge partnerships with statewide groups that have allied, similar interests.
  - Reach out to organizations, individuals, and groups that will bring diverse input (racial, ethnic, geography, etc.) to the initiative.
- Strengthen leadership to increase support for Community Empowerment and the greater vision for early childhood in Iowa.
  - Develop key champions at the state level that assure both political and financial influence around the vision for young children.
  - Broaden the involvement of stakeholders at the local and state levels, focusing particularly on parents and the early childhood (HeadStart, CCR&R, etc.), faith, medical, minority, and business communities.
- Expand organizational capacity to meet the greater vision for young children.
  - Expand state-level capacity to meet the training, technical assistance and operational needs of Community Empowerment.
  - Provide greater professional support at the local level to meet the fiscal, evaluative and programmatic demands of the initiative.
  - Provide guidance to local Empowerment boards on quality early childhood programming and best practices.
  - Integrate Empowerment's 3-5 year targeted goals into the work plans of state agencies.
  - Expand public and private resources to support Community Empowerment both administratively and programmatically.
  - Increase local efficiencies and productivity by regionalizing accounting and, perhaps, other management services.